

BOOK REVIEW

Courts and Elites in the Hellenistic Empires: The Near East after the Achaemenids, c. 330 to 30 BCE. By ROLF STROOTMAN. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014. Pp. xviii + 318. Hardcover, \$135.00. ISBN 978-0-7486-9126-5.¹

This book is the first book in a new series of the Edinburgh University Press, the Edinburgh Studies in Ancient Persia, edited by Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones. After an introduction, outlining several aspects of court and empire in the Hellenistic Near East, the methodology used, and the present state of scholarship on this problem, Strootman illuminates several aspects of life at Hellenistic courts in 12 chapters, divided over three parts (part I: Setting the Scene; part 2: The Court as a Socio-Political System; part 3: ceremonial and Ritual).²

In line with socio-political models offered by Norbert Elias and Jürgen von Krüdener, on the one hand, and by Charles Tilly, on the other, regarding the medieval and early modern age courts (cf. notably chapters 1 and 2), Strootman focuses primarily on the (socio-political) function of the courts of the Macedonian empires of the Hellenistic period. In his attempt, Strootman detects more political continuity in the Aegean world and less in the Middle East than is usually presumed in current scholarship. During the Hellenistic Period (c. 330–30 BCE), Alexander the Great and his successors reshaped the legacy of the Achaemenid empire to create a new kind of rulership, recognizable throughout the ancient world, and one that would also profoundly influence the later development of court architecture and culture and monarchy, not merely in antiquity (as in both the Roman West, e.g. the emperor as *cosmocrator*, and the Iranian East), but at least down to the Ummayyad caliphs.

¹ *Caveat:* Though I am a member of the Editorial Advisory Board of this series of the Edinburgh University Press, I have in no way, at any stage, been involved in the realization and/or production of this volume.

² The book consists of the following chapters: 1. The court as an instrument of power; 2. The theatre of royalty; 3. The royal palace: A stage for royal rituals (all part I); 4. The royal household; 5. Court society; 6. Royal pages; 7. Social dynamics; 8. Hierarchy and conflict (all part II); 9. Ceremonial and protocol; 10. Death and resurrection: Inauguration ritual; 11. The royal entry; and 12. Royal processions: Enacting the myth of empire (all part III).

Throughout his descriptions and analyses, Strootman shows how the Hellenistic dynastic courts made themselves instrumental in the integration of local elites in the empires, and the (re)distribution of power, wealth, and status, making ‘Hellenism’ the ‘reference culture’. Interesting in this respect is the complete absence of evidence “that the Seleukids ever wished to affiliate themselves with the Achaemenids or referred to themselves as the successors of Darius or Xerxes”, even though they were in power in the majority of the former Achaemenid empire. Only late in the 2nd and in the 1st centuries BCE some appropriation took place, but this late Hellenistic Persianism had little to do with continuity. It may accentuate Strootman’s belief that “cultures are usually permeable, flexible and dynamic” (26).

Discussing the monarchies of the Antigonids, Seleucids, and Ptolemies as empires, i.e. supranational organisations with a determined organisation, ideology, and policy, in which cooperation of the imperial centre with local elites played a key part, Strootman succeeds, in my view, in opening new ways for further research, even though that may be more fruitful if more documentary evidence comes available, one way or another. Nevertheless, Strootman himself does suggest some lines of research to pursue (274–247).

Even though I am no particular supporter (let alone admirer) of the emphatically sociological model Strootman applies, I must confess it here yields feasible results. I found especially the discussions on the kings’ *philoï* and the *basilikoi paides* (i.e. royal pages) helpful, in spite of occasional jargon (leading to an abundance of terms written in italic: admittedly shorter but in my view not necessarily clearer).³ As regards the theoretical aspects of his account, Strootman emerges as a well-informed author who, moreover, succeeds to make his audience (graduate students and scholars, but also—I believe—well informed readers) follow him in his search for the mechanisms of power in Hellenistic empires. As such, though written from a different starting point, and with a different perspective, Stroot-

³ Also sentences like: “An explanation of this perhaps remarkable fact has been offered by Gabriel Herman by expounding the interrelation of *philia* and *xenia*. According to Herman, the Greek tradition of *xenia* (or *philoxenia*) – a form of ritualised personal relationships with traits of fictive kinship, usually translated as ‘guest-friendship’ – constituted supranational, ‘horizontal’ elite networks linking men of approximately equal social status but of separate social units, i.e. *poleis*, thus uniting the Greek world at its highest level” (145) should be read very carefully, I think, to be understood in all consequences, certainly when it becomes clear that *xenia* tends to expand its traditional boundaries at the Hellenistic courts.

man's book is in many respects an interesting complement to *King and Court in Ancient Persia 559 to 331 BCE* by Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013). The book is, generally, well taken care of, with very few typos. A solid bibliography and a, regrettably, somewhat meagre general index (because of its theoretical background an index of modern authorities would, in my view, have been at least helpful) conclude this book.

JAN P. STRONK

Universiteit van Amsterdam, Oude Geschiedenis, jpstronk@planet.nl